

Internal Designs
by

Sarah Felker

Spring 2005

Internal Designs

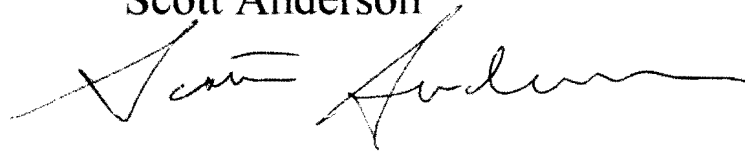
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Sarah Felker

Thesis Advisor

Scott Anderson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Anderson", written in a cursive style.

Ball State University

Muncie, IN

May 2005

SpColl
Thee is
LE
2029
.24
2005
.F45

Abstract and Page of Acknowledgement

This series of paintings in my senior exhibition are intimate spaces and surroundings in my life. Working with all that I have learned at Ball State, I have recently realized that all new ground in painting has been covered; the more personal one makes his or her work, the more unique it is. I tend to retreat into my apartment whenever possible; all of the time spent there has driven me to surround myself with color and objects. The most personal paintings I can make are about my home.

Much of what keeps me interested in painting is the medium itself and the variety of effects I can manipulate. Bold color plays a large role in the personalization of my apartment. Therefore, it is reflected in my paintings, and in turn the paintings become part of my surroundings. I use painting surfaces to describe both architectural and emotional structures. It is interesting to me that some artists consider drips and splatters as accidental, when I find them so beautiful. My experimenting with these techniques has taught me that the results give a sense of spontaneity to the painting. Each painting has a representationally painted object to bring the viewer in and aid them while their eyes unfold the rest of the composition. The most exciting thing to me is the paint itself: the variety of brushstrokes, textures, and the degrees of opacity.

Parts of my personality are shown in the works here, although, still being a private person, I do not like to divulge too much. For example, I see my colored hair as an extension of my creative personality and something of an external palette. Most people do not have the privilege of seeing the beautiful traces of color that the dye leaves behind in the bathtub. I hope this series encourages the viewers to think more deeply about their own intimate spaces, to find beauty in the mundane.

Many thanks to my faculty mentor, Scott Anderson

I find my home to be a comfortable and safe sanctuary. It holds out all of what I find undesirable on the outside. Only a handful of people have been inside my little space, and only those with whom I am closely acquainted. I also find my home to be an extension of my own personality. When I moved in, it was like a blank canvas to be altered and colored with furniture, objects, and my own paintings.

I choose painting over any other medium because of its fluidity and variety. I love the smooth and sensuous brushstrokes of color. A painting can be accomplished much more quickly than a drawing and thus can be more expressive. It can also be finessed into a perfectly realistic image; the variety of the medium is very open-ended.

Home

I retreat into my home, an apartment that was built in the 1920s. This is a building that has been standing before my birth, my mother's birth, and even the birth of my grandmother. What has taken place within our current personal space? I wonder what caused certain marks on the floor, or nicks in the wall. When moving into such a worn space, I felt I needed to contribute to its personality by adding my own unique touches. The white stucco walls needed to be covered with colorful posters, paintings and objects.

I have always felt the urge to personalize my space. Immediately after moving into the dormitories, I pasted various images from ceiling to

floor. Later I would see the barren rooms of other students, with maybe a Prom picture on the dresser; this irritated me. In thinking about this, I can conclude that visual stimulation, even just eye candy, is very important to me.

There are other reasons why my work focuses on the home. I find my home so appealing partly because it hides me from popular culture and society. On the whole I do not enjoy popular music, radio, television, and movies. Therefore, I try to avoid interaction with these superficial and commercialized ideas, and the people that like them. The culture in this area does not have much of an audience for anything aside from mainstream entertainment, so there is even less of a reason to go outside.

Influences

I do not draw too much influence from famous or established artists. I do appreciate them and enjoy their work, but I draw more inspiration from seeing my fellow students at work. I do envy the slick yet sloppy, perfectly placed brushstrokes of Jenny Saville. At one point I wanted to paint like Odd Nerdrum and still appreciate his work. I had discovered the work of Camille Rose Garcia when I was already using many similar elements, such as streaks of wet paint and the juxtaposition of flat, solid shapes with transparent glosses. She also interweaves beautiful patterns, the likes of which had been found on shreds of old

wallpaper. Another attractive element in her work, ironically, is the sense of decay or filth, where colored glazes combine in unpredictable ways.

Technique - process

Much of what keeps me interested in painting is the medium itself and the variety of effects I can manipulate. Bold color plays a large role in the personalization of my apartment. Therefore, it is reflected in my paintings, and in turn the paintings become part of my surroundings. In my past work, I had rarely used such large amounts of white, as I have in this series. Both “white” paintings are in the sterile, washed-out bathroom. There is not much a tenant can do to change the appearance of a bathroom, unfortunately. Images cannot be easily hung and wall tiles cannot be simply replaced.

I use painting surfaces to describe both architectural and emotional structures. It is interesting to me that some artists consider drips and splatters as accidental, when I find them so beautiful. My experimenting with these techniques has taught me that the results give a sense of spontaneity to the painting. Each painting has a representationally painted object to bring the viewer in and aid them while their eyes unfold the rest of the composition. The most exciting thing to me is the paint itself: the diversity of brushstrokes, textures, glosses, and the degrees of opacity. Each painting utilizes one or more of these techniques.

A painting can be executed in many ways. I find that the most interesting and rich method is by layering. For example, I began *Zombi Proof* with an underpainting and proceeded to add elements on top, ranging from solid to quite sheer. Various layers give a painting a sense of history. If viewers see an element that has been partially covered up, they feel as if as if the painting has been a developmental process for the painter. They can try to understand the painter's thoughts in this way. Layers can add visual depth and symbolic meaning in a piece.

Paintings

I see my colored hair as an extension of my creative personality and something of an external palette. It sets me apart from the crowd. Most people do not have the privilege of seeing the beautiful traces of color that the dye leaves behind in the bathtub, as I have tried to convey in *Special Effects*.

To begin this piece, I mixed up the same hues that stain the tub along with a thinning agent, to allow gravity to push the paint, and Galkyd, to keep the paint from flattening. These mixtures form the blue and violet drips that flow from one side of the painting to the other, from the back of the tub to the drain. In this painting it is a realistically-rendered drain, complete with soap scum, that captures the viewer's attention. The rest of the composition is handled almost Impressionistically, with bold brushstrokes and pastel colors. There is a

strong vertical and horizontal in this piece as with *Zombi Proof*. I was not interested in exploring linear perspective, and therefore, there are not many diagonals at all.

Zombi Proof was painted to show my disinterest in the outside, especially in winter. The wildly-colored curtains and bright rectangular elements that lead the eye across the bottom tell the viewer that the inside is more interesting. In contrast, the monotony of winter is confirmed with a dull grey landscape. Apparently, the cat thinks differently and finds the outside more interesting. The steel bars act as a visual barrier.

I also painted a self portrait, *100w*, which I found to be the centerpiece of my show. It portrays my self as only I can see it, in a mirror. The only mirror in the apartment is in the bathroom, on the front of a medicine cabinet. The idea of a medicine cabinet sort of teases the viewer. Guests may find out a lot about a person by taking a peek inside their medicine cabinet. It is such a temptation.

The idea of including a medicine cabinet was so appealing to me because medicine cabinets exist to hide personal things and keep them out of view. Personalities work in such a similar manner. People generally act very guarded around strangers and keep their true insides a secret until they feel more comfortable. In being a private person, this is especially true for me. This series has shown elements of my interior and has also held a lot back.

I find portraits a very challenging, yet interesting, subject to paint. They can tell a lot about a person by the facial expression, or by more subtle hints. For example, calm, careful treatment may give a suggestion of the mood of the character as opposed to the frenzied feeling wild brushstrokes may give. *100w* has a big hollow space under the medicine cabinet, which functions literally as a shelf. This space, which is situated where the figure's torso would be, can be interpreted on a deeper level.

Certain elements were painted in a more realistic style, such as the knob on the cabinet and its hinges. These were painted realistically to make the cabinet more inviting, to lure the viewer into finding out what is inside the cabinet and the person. Other areas had more obvious brushstrokes and sloppy paint. The black shirt is portrayed in this fashion, as well as the wall in the background. The success of the painting was in the combination of the two styles and can be seen as a culmination of my study here.

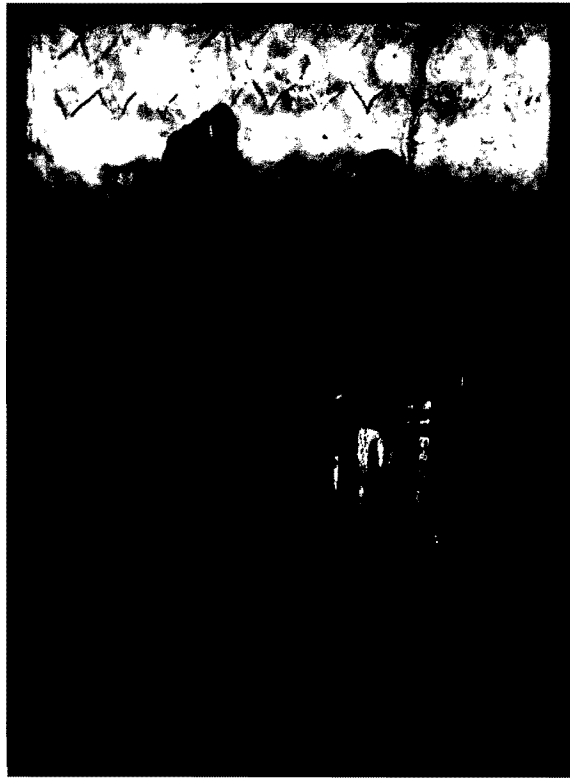
Conclusion

I had these compositions in mind before I had realized that they all had a common theme; I did not know how to connect them all. I later found that they were all domestic images, and because I have hermit status, it would work perfectly for a thesis.

I paint these personal images because they tend to be unique, yet people may still connect with them. The viewers may find some elements in the paintings that are common with their own lives.



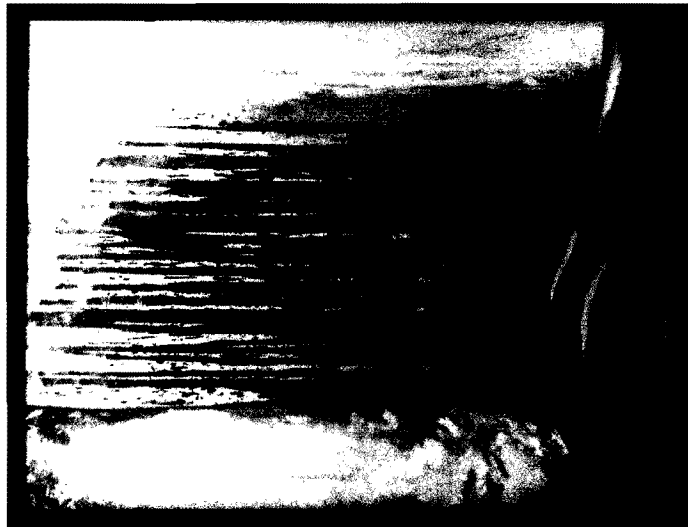
100 w, 4' x 3'



canopy, 4' x 3'



beats, waves; 2.5' x 3.5'



special effects, 3' x 4'



zombi proof, 3' x 4'

Bibliography

Garcia, Camille Rose. *The Saddest Place on Earth: The Art of Camille Rose Garcia*. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2005.

Schama, Simon. *Jenny Saville*. New York: Rizzoli, 2005.

Vine, Richard. *Odd Nerdrum: Paintings, Sketches, and Drawings*. Copenhagen: Gyldenal, 2002.